

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this environmental assessment (EA) is the proposed conversion of the 1-501st Airborne Task Force (ATF) to an Airborne Brigade Combat Team (BCT) to provide a joint and expeditionary airborne response. This action is consistent with the Army's goal of converting all active units to BCTs and shifting from a division-centric to a brigade-centric organization, a concept known as modularity. This conversion would be accomplished by shifting capabilities historically provided at the division level down to the brigade level to enhance a brigade's deployability, efficiency, and self-sufficiency on the battlefield. Capabilities to be transferred to the brigade level include counter-intelligence, human intelligence, and electronic warfare. This new brigade structure is referred to as a Brigade Combat Team; a self-sufficient, lighter, more mobile, and more easily deployable unit. This restructuring would lend support to current and future wartime actions (Department of the Army 2004).

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Army is currently implementing the Army Campaign Plan (Department of the Army 2004), which outlines the next phase of Army modularity. Implementing actions at installations involve the conversion of current forces to BCTs. U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) proposes expanding the existing 1-501st ATF to an Airborne BCT. The purpose of the action is to reorganize the existing airborne unit to meet the Army's modularity goals identified in the Army Campaign Plan. The need for the proposed action is to improve the unit's ability to respond rapidly to the challenges of the 21st century.

The stationing of an Airborne BCT in Alaska is critical to ensure the Army is properly postured to support its strategic commitments, including ongoing operations in support of the global war on terrorism. Additionally, this action allows the Army to continue its transformation with joint and expeditionary capabilities that meet future demands of combatant commanders.

1.2.1 Locations

Fort Richardson

Fort Richardson encompasses approximately 61,000 acres. The post is located in south-central Alaska adjacent to Anchorage, Eagle River, and Elmendorf Air Force Base (Figure 1). The Knik Arm of Cook Inlet borders the north side of the post, and Chugach State Park lies to the south and southeast. The town of Eagle River lies along the northeast border. Anchorage and Elmendorf Air Force Base form the western boundary.

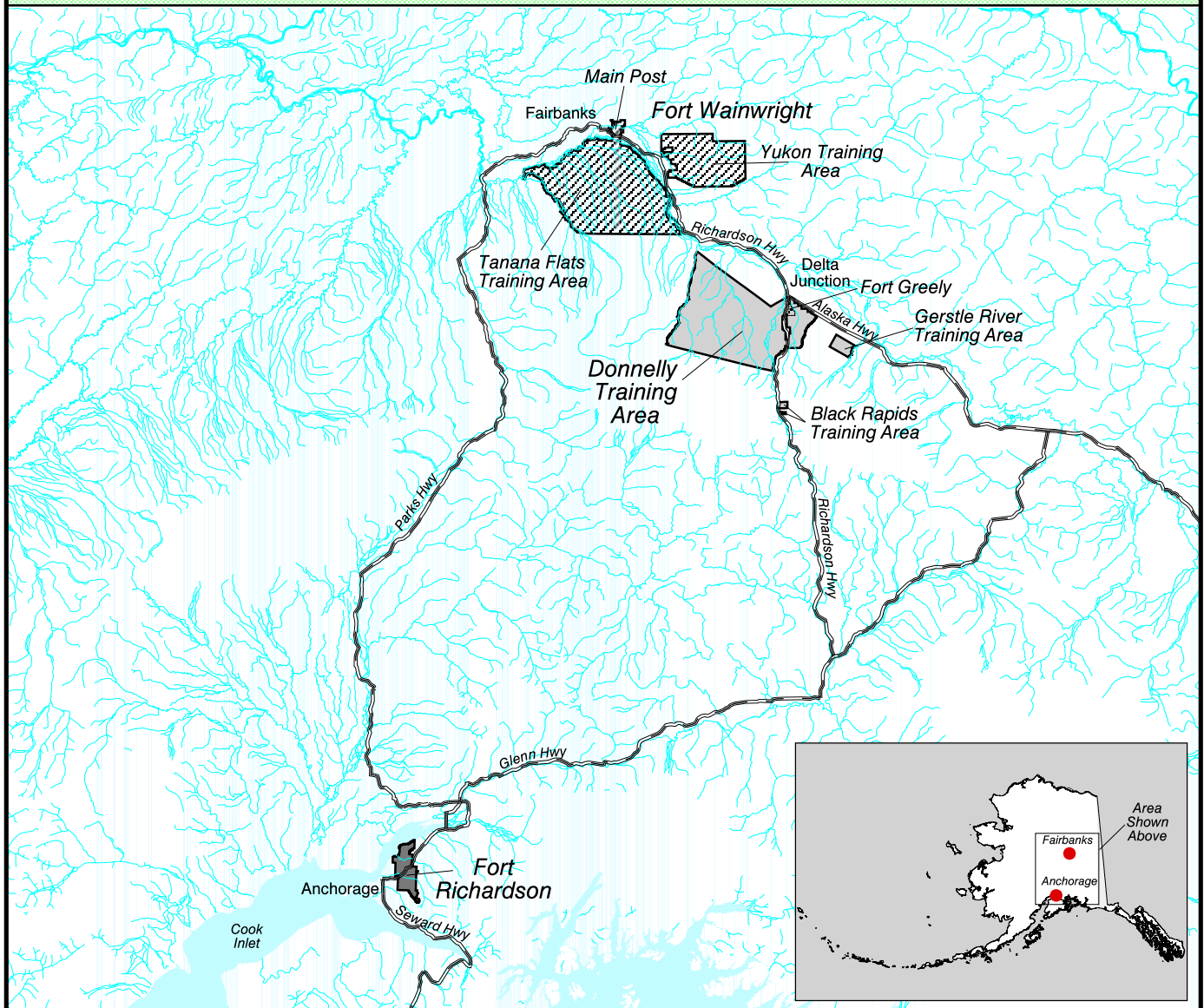
The cantonment area is situated at the base of the Chugach foothills, on the alluvial floodplain between the Chugach Mountains and the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. Located approximately seven miles from downtown Anchorage, the cantonment area is bordered on the west by Elmendorf Air Force Base, on the north by training areas, on the east by the Glenn Highway, and on the south by Ship Creek, recreational areas, and training areas. Fort Richardson's cantonment area comprises approximately 9.4% of the installation's total land area and consists of 5,760 acres, all of which are considered developed.

Fort Wainwright

Fort Wainwright lies 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle near Fairbanks and encompasses approximately 917,000 acres (Figure 1). The post is located in central Alaska, north of the Alaska Range in the Tanana River Valley. The Main Post consists of 13,700 acres, Tanana Flats Training Area (TFTA) is over 655,000 acres, and the Yukon Training Area (YTA) totals 247,952 acres.

Figure 1

General Locations Fort Wainwright, Donnelly Training Area, and Fort Richardson



Legend



Fort Wainwright



Fort Greely



Donnelly Training Area



Streams



Fort Richardson



Highways

Source:
U.S. Army Alaska 2002e,f,g

Scale: 1:3500000

100

0

100 Miles



The Main Post of Fort Wainwright is situated on a flat alluvial plain. It is bordered on the west by the city of Fairbanks and on the other three sides by open space that is owned by the state of Alaska. TFTA is located south of Main Post. Its north and east boundaries are formed by the Tanana River, while the Wood River borders the western edge. YTA is located 16 miles east-southeast of Fairbanks, and the post is bound by the Chena River on the north and Salcha River to the south. Eielson Air Force Base is located on YTA's west border.

Donnelly Training Area

Donnelly Training Area (DTA) is located approximately 100 miles southeast of Fairbanks and lies within the Tanana River Valley (Figure 1). DTA encompasses approximately 624,000 acres. The southern portion of the post is within the foothills of the Alaska Range, and the northern part is bound by the Tanana River. DTA West is 531,000 acres and DTA East is 93,000 acres (USARAK 2002e).

The Little Delta River borders the west boundary of DTA West, and the Delta River and portions of its floodplains form the eastern border. The southern border follows a straight diagonal line from MacArthur Mountain to the Delta River, approximately 26 miles from the intersection of the Alaska and Richardson highways. To the north, the boundary follows a diagonal line from the Little Delta River to Fort Greely. The Delta River and its floodplain form the west side of DTA East, and Granite Creek forms the eastern border. The northern boundary roughly parallels the Alaska Highway, and the southern boundary lies at the base of the Alaska Range's foothills.

Two outlying land parcels are located near DTA. The Gerstle River Training Area is approximately 19,000 acres and is located about three miles south of the Alaska Highway and 30 miles southeast of Delta Junction. Gerstle River Training Area is a rectangular area, oriented northwest to southeast, and measures about five miles, north to south, and nine miles, east to west. Black Rapids Training Area is a 2,780-acre site, located approximately 35 miles south of Delta Junction along the east side of the Richardson Highway.

1.3 SCOPE OF THIS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND DECISION TO BE MADE

The *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969* (NEPA), CFR 1500-1508 and the *Environmental Analysis of Army Actions; Final Rule* [32 CFR Part 651 Fed. Reg. 29 March 02 (67FR15289-15332)] and its implementing regulations require the Army to assess the environmental impacts of permanently reorganizing an existing ATF into an Airborne BCT at Fort Richardson. The scope of the environmental analysis is the impact represented by the increase in personnel and infrastructure. Establishment of the ATF was recently evaluated in a programmatic EIS that considered the consequence of transforming USARAK combat elements as part of the overall Army transformation efforts.

In February 2004, USARAK published a final programmatic EIS setting forth its comprehensive evaluation of environmental impacts associated with the transformation of USARAK airborne and light infantry forces. On 27 May 2004, a Record of Decision was issued by Army officials authorizing transformation of the 1-501st Parachute Infantry Regiment into an ATF and the 172nd Infantry Brigade (Separate) into a Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Because the proposed conversion of the USARAK ATF to an Airborne Brigade Combat Team represents changes to the USARAK airborne force structure considered in the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* (USARAK 2004), federal regulations obligate Army officials to reconsider the potential environmental impacts of this proposed change and to determine whether these proposed changes represent significant new impact, criteria or circumstances relevant to the environmental considerations evaluated within the 2004 EIS. The purpose of this EA is to provide Army decision-makers with sufficient information to make this determination. If this EA represents sufficiently significant new impacts or information supplementation of the 2004 *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* would be required.

This EA will provide the decision-maker with the information necessary to evaluate the environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the alternatives as directed by the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA implementing regulations. The selected alternative will take into account technical, economic and political feasibility; environmental and social issues; and the ability to meet objectives of the USARAK mission and the Army Campaign Plan. The following range of alternatives has been evaluated for presentation to the decision-maker:

- Alternative 1: No Action
- Alternative 2: Convert 1-501st Airborne Task Force to Airborne BCT

1.3.1 Issues Analyzed

The scope of this EA includes potential environmental, cultural, and socioeconomic impacts of the proposed action. Resource categories analyzed for the proposed action and alternatives include air quality, soil resources, water resources, vegetation, wildlife, socioeconomics, and noise.

Discussion includes environmental impacts of the alternatives, any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposed action be implemented (including direct, indirect, long-term, and short-term impacts), any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources, and cumulative impacts. Both of the alternatives are located within U.S. Army Garrison Alaska (USAGAK) boundaries.

1.3.2 Issues Considered and Eliminated from Analysis

The following issues would not be affected by the proposed action and have been eliminated from further analysis:

Environmental Health and Safety Risks for Children

Executive Order 13045, *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks*, requires the identification and assessment of environmental health and safety risks that may disproportionately affect children. In accordance with the mandates of Executive Order 13045, training plans and construction site maps for projects undertaken for the proposed action will be reviewed to ensure no dangerous or hazardous activities occur near schools or childcare facilities. There are no foreseeable environmental health and safety risks for children resulting from the proposed action.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, directs each federal agency to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. There are no foreseeable environmental justice impacts resulting from the proposed action.

Floodplains

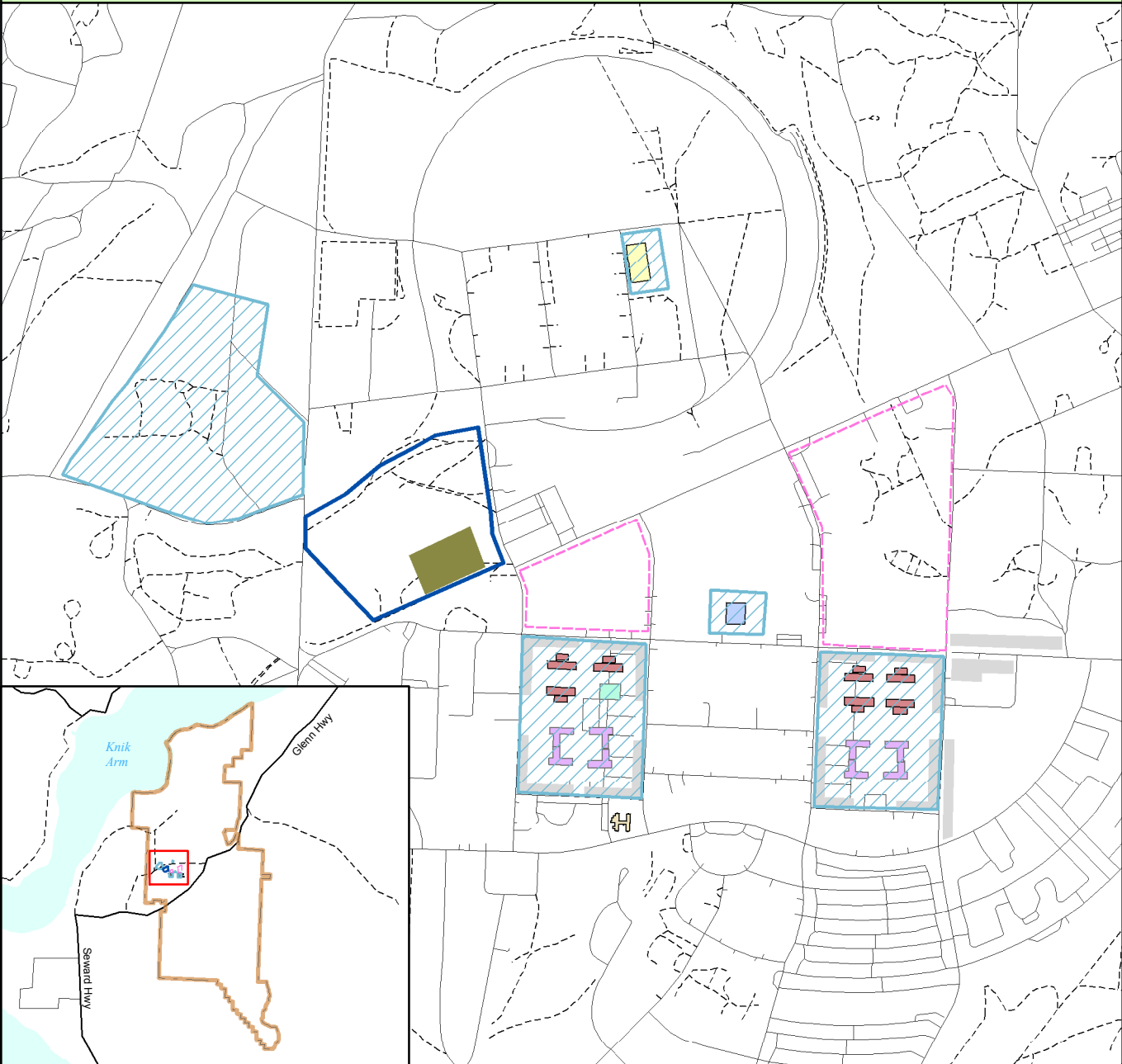
Executive Order 11988, *Floodplains Management*, seeks to avoid impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Construction under the proposed action would be sited to avoid locating new structures within floodplain areas. Locations of proposed construction are identified in Figure 2. If construction within a floodplain is unavoidable, this environmental review would be supplemented. Construction would be in compliance with environmental regulations, including acquisition of required permits prior to any construction activity.

Wetlands
















All construction under the proposed alternative would occur within the Fort Richardson cantonment area and would not be sited in wetland areas.

Figure 2

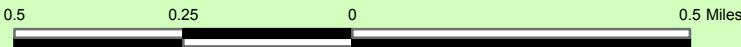
**Proposed Location of Airborne BCT Permanent Facilities
at Fort Richardson**



Legend

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  <i>Installation Boundary</i> |  <i>Company Operations Facility</i> |  <i>Motor Pool</i> |
|  <i>Airborne Sustainment & Operations Facility</i> |  <i>Dining Facility</i> |  <i>Parking</i> |
|  <i>Airborne Expansion</i> |  <i>Hardstand & Storage</i> | <i>Roads</i> |
|  <i>Brigade Headquarters</i> |  <i>Troop Clinic</i> |  <i>Highways</i> |
|  <i>Barracks</i> |  <i>Unit Warm Storage</i> |  <i>Light Duty</i> |
| | |  <i>Trails</i> |

Scale: 1:18,000



Wetlands would be impacted from training as described in the *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* (USARAK2004). Additionally, wetland damage would be mitigated as described in the EIS and the *Integrated Training Area Management Program Management Plan* (USARAK 2005).

USAGAK is in the process of applying for a wetlands permit for training activities. Currently, units are operating under the conditions outlined in a permit that expired this year. Conditions of the expired permit limit wetlands damage to 40 acres of “low value” wetlands per year on Army land in Alaska (USARAK 2004). “High value” wetlands place increased restrictions on training when the ground is not frozen. Any wetland damage must be repaired by the responsible unit. Monitoring is required and would continue with Airborne BCT training. Past monitoring indicates that approximately 3.5 acres are damaged each year (Walsh 2001; Mason 2002). Roads, bivouacs, staging areas, and drop zones have all been developed to allow for travel and training to avoid off-road impacts. While damage may increase slightly with the conversion of the ATF to an Airborne BCT, the amount of damage is likely to remain well below the 40 acre per year limit.

Current NEPA analysis by USAGAK seeks to assess and limit impacts to wetlands due to training as part of the wetlands permit renewal for training. Training occurring under this proposed action would abide by any findings of the NEPA documentation and the conditions of the new wetlands permit for training. Completion of the new permit is anticipated for winter 2005. It is expected additional limitations will be placed on troops by classifying more wetlands as “high value” and therefore increasing restrictions for training when not frozen.

Cultural Resources

The proposed action would not affect the Site Summit property – the single property on Fort Richardson currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. No cultural resources sites are believed to be located in any of the proposed project areas. Additional evaluation is underway. If the proposed action is found to impact historic properties, additional NEPA analysis would be completed. The Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer will be consulted regarding USAGAK’s finding for this undertaking. The consultation will meet USAGAK obligations under Section 106, National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended, PL 89-665; 16 USC 470 et seq.). If required, appropriate analysis and mitigation will be implemented in consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office.

Archaeological sites and properties of traditional, religious, and cultural significance would be impacted and mitigated as described in the *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* (USARAK 2004) and the Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plans for each installation.

Human Health and Safety

None of the facilities to be constructed as a part of this proposed action would be located on land with known contamination. Should contamination be discovered during preconstruction or construction, appropriate soil remediation would be implemented. These methods would be agreed upon by the Army, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Standards spill prevention measures would be taken during construction. An Excavation Clearance Request (dig permit) must be obtained prior to any excavation activities.

Any discovered contaminated soil or groundwater would not be removed from construction sites without written approval from an authorized USAGAK representative. All operations involving hazardous waste would be accomplished in accordance with USAGAK Pamphlet 200-1, Environmental Quality: Hazardous Waste, Used Oil, and Hazardous Materials Management, and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation regulations.

Public Access and Recreation

The proposed action would not significantly change existing outdoor recreation use on Fort Richardson, Fort Wainwright, and DTA. All proposed construction projects are within industrial portions of the cantonment area and are not used for recreational purposes. Increased training as a result of the proposed action may result in reduced public access to training lands for recreation. However, given the overall size and availability of USARAK lands open to the public, the proposed action would have a negligible effect. Impacts to public access and recreation from training would not exceed those described in the *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* (USARAK 2004).

Subsistence

Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) requires federal agencies to evaluate the potential impact that proposed actions may have on customary rural subsistence practices. Fort Wainwright main post area and all of Fort Richardson are situated within regions designated as urban. For this reason, federal subsistence regulations do not provide a subsistence preference on Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright main post area. All hunting, fishing and vegetation gathering on these installations are currently managed as recreational undertakings. For these reasons, any proposed activity on Fort Richardson or on Fort Wainwright main post would not adversely impact customary rural subsistence practices. Increased training activities on Donnelly Training Area and Fort Wainwright training lands (Tanana Flats and Yukon Training Areas) could reduce access to training areas for subsistence purposes. However, as described in the Public Access and Recreation section above, anticipated impacts are not expected to be substantially different from those described in the *Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska Final EIS* (USARAK 2004).

1.4 OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSES RELEVANT TO THE ACTION

Previously prepared EAs and EISs that address ongoing actions, issues, or baseline data at USAGAK are used as background information or are incorporated by reference into this EA where appropriate. Examples of such NEPA documentation are:

- *Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Army Transformation*, March 2002
- *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Transformation of U.S. Army Alaska*, Vol. 1-2, U.S. Army Alaska, February 2004
- *Environmental Assessment for the Integrated Training Area Management Program Management Plan*, U.S. Army Garrison – Alaska, April 2005

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

This chapter describes the proposed action (convert the existing ATF to an Airborne BCT at Fort Richardson), an alternative to the proposed action, a discussion of alternatives eliminated from detailed consideration, and offers a summary of environmental consequences associated with the proposed action and alternatives.

USARAK proposes to reorganize the 1-501st ATF to an Airborne BCT. Additional Soldiers, facilities, and equipment would be required for this action. The increased stationing of Soldiers would be used to form additional companies/squadrons to further increase the unit's self-sufficiency and deployability. Additional facilities would be required to provide adequately sized and configured facilities to accommodate the Airborne BCT. Required facilities include: barracks, headquarters facilities, a vehicle maintenance facility, storage facility, classroom facility, dining facility, heavy drop rigging facility, and a sustainment and operations complex. Acquisition of equipment and increased training requirements